RE—THINK—ING—RUSSIA

PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY AND ITS ROLE IN MODERN POLITICS

Analytical Report

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Introduction

The first *Development of Parliamentarism* International Forum was held in Moscow June 4-5, 2018. It brought together over 500 people from 96 countries. 19 countries were represented by chairmen of parliaments, and 15 states were represented by vice-chairmen. Moreover, the Forum was attended by representatives of 11 international parliamentary organizations, as well as over 120 experts from 55 countries.

In his greetings to the participants, organizers and guests, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that there existed a "high demand for parliamentary diplomacy. It can strengthen trust among nations and positively influence the settlement of the most painful international and regional problems."

The Forum did not merely focus on parliamentary diplomacy. It epitomized this rapidly expanding format of global interaction. Parliamentary diplomacy can hardly be regarded as a new format of international cooperation, but it has acquired considerable relevance in recent years.

Russia is in the vanguard of developing the diplomatic dimension of parliamentary work and spearheads intensified parliamentary efforts across the globe. Apart from testifying to the search for new tools to promote the country's position, it definitely points to a good sense of timing as the legislative branch is expected worldwide to be increasingly mindful of constituents' opinions and analysis while setting the agenda.

At the opening of the Forum, State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin remarked that "in a world where unilateral sanctions are gradually becoming the major foreign policy instrument and where state-to-state ties are severed, parliamentarians can help preserve some trust and connections between peoples." Few, quite evidently, succeed in communicating the aversion of ordinary citizens to wars and their need for

mutual respect and good-neighbourliness, and parliamentarians whom they elect cannot but acknowledge it.

New barriers in world politics stand in the way of economic and social processes and, thereby, disregard the basic interests of modern societies. Parliamentary diplomacy is an effective instrument to resist the expansion of the sanctions tyranny as it is reinforced by the electorate casting a ballot for their MPs as well as by common sense.

Issues raised at the Development of Parliamentarism International Forum pointed to a new way of healing the existing divisions rather than merely highlighted how deep they are nowadays.

Parliamentarism can no longer be regarded as just a part of the democratic system or a distinguishing feature of domestic politics. It is now an independent actor in the globalized world and can be a counterbalance to those who tend to abuse non-state mechanisms and undermine sovereignty.

Parliamentary diplomacy offers new opportunities for managing and dealing with ever more numerous sources of instability.

Parliamentary Diplomacy and Changing Formats of International Interaction

In an increasingly globalized world witnessing the step-by-step removal of communication and language barriers, various forms of diplomacy going beyond the traditional realm, have an ever bigger role to play in international politics.

Along with the explosive growth of interaction mechanisms between different civil societies - which adds a new dimension to public diplomacy, people's diplomacy - different formats of parliamentary diplomacy are increasingly used in modern global processes. They facilitate a direct interaction between representative bodies which can act on behalf of the peoples.

Parliaments combine features inherent in formal diplomatic channels (the legitimate status) and people’s diplomacy (voicing popular sentiments and interests, as well as expert opinions). The combination of these features exerts a powerful synergetic effect encouraging a vigorous exchange of opinions and collective decision-making at international venues.

Parliamentary diplomacy is not exclusively aimed at establishing the legal basis for international relations. It also seeks to strengthen ties and solidify interstate and interregional integration. The term “parliamentary diplomacy” was coined in 1955 by Dean Rusk, who used it to describe the negotiation process and deliberations in an international organization. It has been used in the scientific and political discourse ever since. Back then it was stated that parliamentary diplomacy predominantly sought to enhance understanding between countries, to make the government more accountable, to better represent the people, and to increase the democratic legitimacy of intergovernmental institutions. In essence, it can be noted that these tasks are still relevant for parliamentary diplomacy.

Parliamentary diplomacy works via numerous mechanisms. Primarily, they relate to two major areas, namely international activity of national parliaments and work of MPs in international parliamentary organizations. Any legislative assembly has some IR tools, including participation in interparliamentary conferences, bilateral and multilateral interparliamentary interaction, a system of parliamentary monitoring, and so on. On the other hand, parliamentary bodies within integration associations and international organizations allow the toolkit to grow significantly as they supplement and develop it.

Parliamentary diplomacy can be analysed from the institutional and political perspective. The institutional analysis focuses on the status of a parliament in the country's foreign policy as provided for by national law. A parliament is to perform specific functions, such as the ratification of international treaties, the approval of nominees for ambassadors, etc. Most importantly, its functions include the ratification of international treaties concluded between governments. Under the international law treaties which require amendments or new laws are to be ratified by the parliament.

The political analysis revolves around more extensive engagement of parliament and MPs in identifying and promoting a country's foreign policy priorities. In the latter case, the international role of the parliament can vary, as experts believe, and will depend on three parameters, such as the traditions of national parliamentarism, the characteristics of the political system and the state's standing in the world arena.

Innovative interaction formats are strongly needed in world politics given the escalating tensions, the polarized traditional system of international relations, and the insularity of formal diplomatic tools, with official diplomats increasingly relying on tools of public diplomacy, which prove to be more efficient. Parliamentary initiatives show considerable potential and can help take concerted action at the state level to construct

an objective picture of Russia in foreign media and satisfy popular demand for variety while presenting opinions and analysis of topical international issues.

Over time, the potential and resources of parliamentary diplomacy have been growing incessantly. It is already in high demand today and its popularity will only grow in the future. It can primarily be accounted for in the following way. It is MPs who help to overcome the alienation of the state from its citizens, to tackle the democratic deficit, or people's distrust of the activities of state bodies associated with rigid bureaucracy, which is ignorant and out of sync with people's immediate needs.

The best practices of parliamentary diplomacy include assisting in conflict resolution, maintaining relations with political forces from a country amid a diplomatic chill, creating a less biased, if not positive, picture of a country, and exerting the impact on public opinion abroad.

Parliamentary Diplomacy in Modern World Politics

Parliamentary diplomacy embraces elements of official diplomacy and elements of public diplomacy, since MPs act on behalf of their constituents. Parliamentarians are legitimate representatives of their countries, elected democratically and guarding the interests of the broad masses.

Parliamentary bodies fulfil several important international functions, including legislative, controlling, organizational and representative ones. Parliamentary diplomacy is integral to monitoring international activities of the executive branch, helping ministers and civil servants to stay focused on national development while dealing with various current issues.

Apart from other major realms, parliamentary diplomacy is used to ensure international security. National parliaments, as well as such formats of interparliamentary cooperation as the OSCE PA, PACE, PA CSTO, and IPA CIS, contribute to ensuring national security, energy security, economic security and humanitarian security, environmental protection, preservation of water resources, and road safety. While serving their primary functions, parliaments increasingly engage in decision-making on security matters at the national, regional and international levels.

Parliamentary diplomacy is intertwined with the implementation of the basic principles of international law and the UN Charter, the compliance with international commitments, the conclusion and implementation of international agreements, the use of diplomatic protocol, the establishment and work of interparliamentary organizations and associations, their cooperation with intergovernmental and intergovernmental structures, the promotion of foreign policy initiatives, protection of business interests, etc.

Experts believe advances in parliamentary diplomacy have to do with the institutionalization of entirely new actors in international relations, including non-governmental organizations, transnational corporations, global cities, foundations, thinktanks, etc.

In today's context, parliamentary diplomacy can contribute to international stabilization, in particular to the efforts to defuse tensions between countries with the help of new ideology-driven transnational groups, which can curb extreme nationalism and assist in reaching a compromise.

As the parliamentary dimension of state-to-state relations remains key in addressing most relevant problems, global and regional interparliamentary associations have so far carved a legitimate place among other international actors.

Parliamentary Diplomacy in Russia

Along with other changes that the Russian parliament has gone through since the first session of the Duma's seventh convocation, the country's supreme legislative and representative body has moved closer to the forefront of international discourse or Russian foreign policies, which is of special importance. Both chambers of the Federal Assembly, the Federation Council and the State Duma, engage in parliamentary diplomacy.

The issue of institutionalizing parliamentary diplomacy never used to be specially raised in Russia. The notion itself periodically found its way both into individual statements of deputies and media assessments covering the parliament's international contacts. Since it's first convocation, the State Duma has played an important role in the country's foreign policy and the development of international relations in various spheres and at various institutional levels. However, it is just two years since the activities took on a notably systematic character.

The Russian Federation's Foreign Policy Concept, which was approved by President Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016, tasks both chambers of the Federal Assembly not only with legislative support of foreign policies and the fulfillment of international obligations but also with improving the effectiveness of parliamentary diplomacy.

Parliamentary diplomacy is increasingly moving beyond protocol activities of exclusively international committees. Actually, the leadership of both chambers, with the two speakers at the helm, and all parliamentarians have direct contacts with their foreign counterparts, paying working visits both to the near and far abroad, holding meetings with public officials and civil society representatives in different countries, and articulating new ideas and mechanisms for resolving various international problems. Foreign representatives tend to visit the Russian

parliament and here the point is not just to maintain the existing ties but also to expand cooperation and find solutions to problems.

An important feature of Russia's current parliamentary diplomacy is its focus on resolving particular pressing issues. Russian parliamentarians use the practice of settling conflicts of ordinary citizens at the international level, which is especially needed to shape mechanisms for regional integration in Eurasia.

Deputies effectively demonstrate the political will to find answers to challenges because, firstly, they belong to a representative assembly, and secondly, they come closest to the needs and aspirations of ordinary citizens, their voters, from whom they receive appeals and instructions.

In terms of the effectiveness of parliamentary diplomacy - and in the broadest sense, given the relevant foreign policy tasks - the speaker's trips to Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America have a very symbolic meaning.

The fact that different parliamentary delegations have visited Moscow also testifies to the effectiveness of parliamentary diplomacy. Such meetings at the State Duma increasingly produce joint initiatives, which are consistent with the logic of bilateral relations and Russia's foreign policy priorities in numerous spheres.

Foreign political figures have again received the chance to address the Russian parliament. A greater parliamentary dialogue constitutes a mechanism, which will allow scope for expanding those areas of cooperation that require more careful and regular attention.

Parliamentary diplomacy has made a significant contribution to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Many experts highlight EAEU parliaments' strong contribution to the institutionalization of the association and the ongoing systematic work to harmonize the national legislations of the member countries in order to provide a single

economic space for free trade and to increase the level of integration, which will also continue on the parliamentary track.

In 2016, Vyacheslav Volodin was elected Head of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly, with Valentina Matviyenko reappointed Chair of the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS). Both chambers' active involvement in an expanded integration agenda adds to the national interests and popular demands for closer cooperation with historical neighbors.

To some extent, parliamentary diplomacy seems to give more room for maneuver, combining functions of official diplomacy in discussing certain issues and in engaging in direct P2P (parliament-parliament) contacts.

As for political opportunities that arise out of the use of parliamentary diplomacy tools, one would like to cite the situation around the visits of different groups of European deputies to Crimea, which has taken place in spite of EU bans and sanctions against this part of Russia. This is of particular interest, since parliamentarians were in an official status. Actually, they represent not only certain European bureaucrats that have imposed the sanctions, but also wide layers of societies, thereby breaking through the blockade and isolation of the Crimea and opening a new page in the history of human contacts between Europeans and Crimeans.

To establish a dialogue between Russia and its partners, including those with whom relations are currently at an extremely low level, the potential of parliamentary diplomacy must be fully realized. Sanctions and other problems can be discussed by parliamentarians, many of whom have diplomatic experience and a certain popular mandate to establish relations with partners.

At the international level, parliamentary cooperation has become an integral part of Russian politics and a result of the alignment of Russia's

foreign policy strategy and the principles of "soft power" and the expansion of the strategic communication with foreign countries.

In its turn, the “Development of Parliamentarism” International Forum has emerged as a natural stage of the instrumentalization of the relevant work of the State Duma with other foreign parliaments. In fact, as a regular mechanism for a global interparliamentary dialogue, the forum shapes a new parliamentary identity of contemporary international relations which are complex, controversial, not always stable, but of extreme importance for each country and every voter.

The Forum ended with the adoption of the Declaration, which highlights the broad areas of promising interparliamentary cooperation, including the de-escalation of international tensions, support for the establishment of a polycentric fair world order, cooperation in shaping common rules and common standards for the exchange of information and its protection, and in the implementation of digital technologies. Moreover, the Declaration of the "Development of Parliamentarism" Forum condemns the policy of sanctions - the practice of “anti-UN unilateral restrictions and other repressive measures against parliamentarians and the media that are inconsistent with international law, the spirit of parliamentarism, and the foundations of mutual trust" .

Modern diplomacy, including on the parliamentary track, is not limited to merely bilateral ties with certain states. A large role is played by network or multi-agent forms of international interaction, which, under the conditions of a pluralist representative government, have become the most effective elements harmoniously applied to the practice of parliamentary diplomacy aimed at developing and coordinating approaches to solving a wide range of problems under a high variability of the interests involved.

Parliamentary assemblies, as an independent dimension of relevant international institutions and organizations, represent, on the one hand,

mechanisms for political support for the unification of states and broad working groups for developing the most appropriate vision for people in key areas of cooperation on the other.

The State Duma’s initiatives to participate in foreign policy activities are in a high demand not only for voters who want to directly communicate their positions to international actors, but also for the external environment. The organization of parliamentary events to discuss pressing issues on the world agenda, deputies’ participation in international conferences, and statements to the foreign media contribute to a greater openness and clarity of the Russian position on various international issues.

Interest in Russian parliamentarians is always at a high level, and their opinions are a focal point in terms of the perception of Russia and its politics in many parts of the world. The development and improvement of this work lie at the heart of Russia's self-sufficient, active, and effective parliamentary diplomacy in the modern world.

Authors

Alexander Konkov - Ph.D. in Political Science, Director of the Rethinking Russia, Associate Professor at the Political Analysis Department of Moscow State University.

Roman Chukov - Ph.D. in Political Science, Chair of the Board at the Russian Centre for Promotion of International Initiatives, Research Fellow in the Institute of Economy of the Russian Academy of Science.

Stanislav Tkachenko - Doctor of Economics, Professor in the Department of European Studies of the School of International Relations at Saint Petersburg State University, Professor at the University of Bologna (Italy), Expert at the International Institute for Monitoring Democracy Development, Parliamentarianism and Suffrage Protection of Citizens of IPA CIS Member Nations (IPA CIS IIMDD).

Andrea Giannotti - Ph.D. in Political Science, Director of the Institute for Eurasian Studies (Italy), Expert at the Pisa University.